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ARTICLES:

(1) U.S. Ambassador: Existing plan on Futenma relocation is the best option

NIKKEI (Page 2) (Full)
January 30, 2010

In a speech at Waseda University yesterday, U.S. Ambassador to Japan John Roos said in reference to the relocation of the U.S. Marine Corps' Futenma Air Station in Okinawa: "The Marine Corps is a rapid reaction force that is capable of mobilizing its troops more quickly than any other units in times of emergency. If Marines are moved out of Japan, the mobility and effectiveness of the U.S. forces will be significantly undermined." He said that the current plan to relocate the Futenma facility to a coastal area in the Henoko district in Nago City is "the result of a discussion that lasted over more than ten years and is the best option for enabling the Futenma base to be closed in the shortest period of time."

The Ambassador went on to say: "All countries in the region are paying close attention to moves by U.S. forces in Japan. Showing troops engaged in military exercises in Japan that are close to actual battle conditions must act as a deterrent," stressing the importance of the presence of U.S. forces in Japan.

With respect to Japan's host nation support (HNS) (the so-called omoiyari yosan, or "sympathy budget") for U.S. forces in Japan, the Ambassador pointed out: "Frankly speaking, I don't think it is

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appropriate to call host nation support a sympathy budget," adding: "HNS is a way for Japan and the U.S. to share the costs of maintaining in Japan the world's most expensive military capabilities."

(2) Ambassador Roos: Presence of Okinawa bases becoming "more important"

MAINICHI (Page 8) (Full)
January 30, 2010

Delivering a speech in Tokyo yesterday, U.S. Ambassador to Japan John Roos reiterated the need for the continued presence of U.S. military bases in Okinawa. He said: "Although the Cold War has ended, Okinawa is becoming not less but more important in view of strategy due to regional security circumstances (such as North Korea's nuclear development and China's military modernization)."

He further said: "Okinawa has the potential to become a 'bridge' between Japan, Asia and the U.S." and then proposed the concept of the Japanese and U.S. governments' establishing a global-level science and technology research institute in Okinawa with the aim of developing industry through technological development.

The Ambassador, who used to work as a lawyer in Silicon Valley, might have in mind some ideas for contributing to the Okinawan economy.

The Ambassador said that the existing agreements on the relocation of the Futenma airfield and other U.S. force realignment plans were reached between Japan and the U.S. "as a result of the efforts to achieve a balance between consideration for Okinawan people's concerns and its strategic importance." In reference to the presence of U.S. Marines in Okinawa, he pointed out: "The Marine Corps has the capability to quickly convey its combat and support troops by helicopter to any place on the archipelago connecting Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia. In cases of strategies that require heavy equipment or cover a long period of time, the Marines can be redeployed to any location within several days, with support from the U.S. Navy base in Sasebo." He pointed out that the Marines were mobilized to provide emergency humanitarian aid in response to 12 disasters over the past five years, including the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake.

The Ambassador further stated: "Although we should make utmost efforts to achieve U.S. President Barack Obama's vision of ridding the world of nuclear weapons, for the sake of the U.S., Japan and other allies the U.S. remains firmly resolved to maintain its deterrence capability until the goal is attained."

The Ambassador cited North Korea as "the biggest cause for concern" in the Asia-Pacific region. He emphasized that "there is growing concern" over "the possible collapse of the regime led by leader Kim Jong Il" in the context of a leadership succession, in addition to concern over its nuclear and missile development programs. On China, he expressed apprehension about China's military modernization in the areas of "cyber warfare and strategic weapons, such as anti-satellite-weapons and nuclear-powered submarines."

(3) Ambassador Roos says current Futenma relocation plan is "best option"

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OKINAWA TIMES (Page 26) (Full)
January 30, 2010

Tokyo - U.S. Ambassador to Japan John Roos gave a speech at Waseda University on Jan. 29, in which he pointed out that the current plan to relocate the U.S. forces' Futenma Air Station to Henoko in Nago City is the "best option." Regarding the role of U.S. Forces Japan (USFJ), including U.S. forces in Okinawa, Roos emphasized the importance of the USFJ's presence, saying: "They not only ensure rapid response, but also serve as a visible deterrent." On the Japanese government's share in the USFJ's expenditures, he explained that "this is an important measure to share the cost of maintaining in Japan the U.S.'s most advanced military capability." He argued that "it is inappropriate to call this omoiyari yosan (sympathy budget)."

The Ambassador said that the significance of the USFJ's continuing to conduct exercises in Japan lies "not only in ensuring rapid response to any situation but also in serving as a visible deterrent."

(4) Japan, U.S. to hold talks on deepening bilateral alliance on Feb. 2 in Tokyo

NIKKEI (Page 2) (Full)
January 31, 2010

The governments of Japan and the United States will hold on Feb. 2 in Tokyo a Security Subcommittee (SSC) meeting of director-general level foreign and defense officials, aiming to move talks on deepening the bilateral alliance into full gear, coinciding with the 50th anniversary of the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty. The Japanese government will propose strengthening cooperation on the expanded deterrence policy, including a missile defense system, space strategy, and the U.S.'s nuclear umbrella, based on changes in the security environment of the Asia-Pacific region.

The SSC analyzes the environment of the Japan-U.S. security arrangements, which are gradually changing, with an eye on China's rise in the economic and military spheres, as well as North Korea's nuclear ambitions. In addition to a missile defense system, the SSC will systematically discuss a collaborative framework on cyber attacks and relief operations. The Japanese side is expected to request that the SSC review the SOFA and Japan's host-nation support (the so-called sympathy budget) for the U.S. forces in Japan.

The two governments agreed at a meeting of their foreign ministers on Jan. 12 in Hawaii to initiate talks on deepening the bilateral alliance even before the Futenma issue is resolved. For the Japan-U.S. relationship, which has been strained over the Futenma issue, the talks on deepening the alliance will play the ironic role of preventing the two countries from moving away from each other.

(5) Foreign Minister Okada in foreign policy speech underscores determination to exercise leadership for nuclear disarmament

Foreign Minister Katsuya Okada delivered a foreign policy speech on Jan. 29 at the plenary session of all lawmakers from both chambers of the Diet for the first time since the change of government. In

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his policy speech, Okada stressed that he will exercise his leadership in dealing with such global issues as nuclear arms reduction, saying, "Japan is called upon to act proactively and respond to international expectations." In connection with Japan-U.S. relations, he expressed his determination to tackle the issues of the Japan-U.S. Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) and Japan's contribution to the cost of stationing the U.S. forces in Japan.

With regard to the relocation of the U.S. Marine Corps' Futenma Air Station (in Ginowan City, Okinawa Prefecture), Okada said, "The government on its part will make a decision by the end of May." He also stated that he wishes to deepen public understanding for the presence of the U.S. forces in Japan, while deepening the Japan-U.S. alliance. On North Korea, he said Japan will seek to normalize relations by resolving issues such as the abductions of Japanese nationals by North Korea and the nuclear issue, as well as by settling the unfortunate past. In connection with Japan-China ties, he stated that Japan will enhance and give shape to the strategic reciprocal relationship.

Demonstrating the basic perception that the international community has embarked on a new era of cooperation, with the inauguration of U.S. President Barack Obama as a catalyst, Okada expressed his determination to deepen discussions with relevant nations on the issues of nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation.

(6) Expert panel to admit existence of three Japan-U.S. secret pacts

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 3) (Full)
January 30, 2010

An expert panel tasked with examining documents related to alleged secret accords between Japan and the U.S. has decided to admit the existence of three pacts in its final report to be compiled by the end of March, according to informed sources. The Foreign Ministry's panel, chaired by Tokyo University Professor Shinichi Kitaoka, plans to admit the existence of: (1) a pact allowing the U.S. military to bring nuclear weapons into Japan in 1960, when the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty was revised; (2) a pact on combat action by the U.S. military in times of emergency on the Korean Peninsula; and (3) a pact allowing the U.S. military to reintroduce nuclear weapons into Okinawa in the event of a contingency made at the time of the reversion of Okinawa from U.S. control to Japanese sovereignty.

In response to this development, the government will change its conventional position of denying the existence of any secret accords with the U.S. The government has already prepared to start behind-the-scenes coordination with the U.S. to confirm the contents of the secret accords. On the secret accord designed to tacitly allow U.S. military vessels carrying nuclear weapons to make stopovers in Japan or pass through Japanese territory and the accord to allow the U.S. to bring nuclear weapons into Okinawa, the focus of discussion is on their compatibility with the nation's three non-nuclear principles. The U.S. side has expressed concern about (Japan's investigation's) possible impact on its nuclear policy. There might be some effect on the talks designed to deepen the Japan-U.S. alliance, which is being rocked over the issue of relocating the U.S. Marine Corps' Futenma Air Station.

The texts or drafts of the three accords in question have already

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been discovered, according to informed sources. In addition, successive senior Foreign Ministry officials have testified on the

pacts. However, the panel has yet to discover any documents related to the remaining accord concerning Japan's payment of fees for restoring the land used by the U.S. military to its original state, so the investigation on this accord will be continued.

(7) Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Takino to head new Okinawa Liaison Office

JIJI.COM (Full)
12:43, February 1, 2010

At a news conference on the morning of Feb. 1, Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirofumi Hirano announced that Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Kinya Takino has been appointed as the head of the new Okinawa Liaison Office created under the Cabinet Secretariat to take charge of coordination with Okinawa on base issues and economic development measures. The appointment took effect on Jan. 29.

Takino will head a staff of seven in the new office. The liaison office will open a branch at the Okinawa General Bureau of the Cabinet Office (in Naha). Masaaki Takezawa, head of the Okinawa General Bureau, and five other officials have been appointed to serve in the branch office.

(8) Okinawa in turmoil for 13 years over Futenma-linked economic measures, remains dependent on military bases

NIKKEI (Page 27) (Full)
February 1, 2010

One week has passed since an opponent to accepting the relocation of the U.S. forces' Futenma Air Station won the Nago City mayoral election in Okinawa. Over the 13 years since the government sounded out the city about Futenma's relocation to Henoko in Nago, Okinawa has been at the mercy of Tokyo's policies. Base-related money spent on Okinawa and the economic measures have shackled the local governments, aggravating their dependence on the bases. Will Okinawa be able to break the spell?

Anxiety over subsidies

A brand new building with a red tiled roof stands out when one enters the Henoko district on the east coast of Nago City. This is the "Henoko communication plaza" built in 2007. Approximately 90 percent of the 900 million yen used to build this civic hall that has an auditorium capable of accommodating several hundred people, a fitness center, a computer room, and other facilities was paid out of the Ministry of Defense's budget. The building is conspicuously plush. A housewife, 54, living nearby says: "I visit the library for lectures or go there for a massage at least three times a week."

100 billion yen in 10 years

Since Nago declared its willingness to accept Futenma relocation in 1999, the government has doled out as much as 100 billion yen in 10 years for economic development projects in northern Okinawa and various other forms of subsidies. Over 60 billion yen has been spent on Nago City, which has a population of 60,000. The G-8 Kyushu-Okinawa Summit was held here in 2000 and a national technical college was founded. At its peak, nearly 30 percent of the city's

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revenues were related to the U.S. bases.

A restaurant owner in his 70s laments that, "Still, this is no match for the Vietnam War period, when the entertainment district catering to the American soldiers thrived." Although the population of Henoko has increased from 1,500 10 years ago to 2,000, the economic spinoffs have been less than what was expected. Most of the faculty members and employees of the technical college and the employees of the companies invited to northern Okinawa commute from the urban center on the west coast, so there are no economic benefits for Henoko.

The Toyohara district next to Henoko was designated as a special information technology zone and the only special financial zone in

the country in 2002. Buildings including a "multimedia hall" were built, and 935 people work for 27 companies there. Over 70 percent of them were reportedly hired from northern Okinawa. Dealers of a branch office of Gaitame.com, a foreign currency margin trading company, process buy or sell orders in a glassed-in dealing room. Takahiko Yasunaga, 39, deputy chief of the secretariat of the Nago Development Authority, reveals that, "Right now, only one company has been designated as eligible to receive preferential treatment. It will be difficult for us to become self-reliant immediately." He is worried that with the election of an opponent to accepting the military base as mayor, economic assistance from the national government may decrease.

The seven-story Nago business assistance center housing the city's business organization and tourism association overlooks the Nago intersection at the center of the city, and across the street, construction work on the city government's housing project is in progress. This makes it look as if the city is full of vitality. Yet, there are so many shops that are closed or have "for rent" signs posted in the shopping district. Nago citizens all agree that, "We don't feel that life has become any better."

As the government proceeds with these economic development projects, it is becoming increasingly frustrated with the stalemate in the relocation process. It has created a new "U.S. Forces Japan realignment subsidy" system, which is a carrot-and-stick scheme aimed at pressuring the local communities by paying out subsidies to local governments depending on the degree of their cooperation and freezing such subsidies for localities opposing relocation plans.

Former Mayor Katsusuke Ihara, 59, of Iwakuni City in Yamaguchi Prefecture, who clashed with the government over the stationing of aircraft carrier-based planes, points out: "The government's method of forcing bases on the local communities with money has reached its limits. The citizens of Nago probably feel keenly that military bases do not contribute to economic development."

Eighty-three percent of the land area of the town of Kadena is occupied by the Kadena Air Base (KAB), the largest U.S. military base in the Far East. Last year, the statues of three men were erected in the new building built next to the town hall as part of a redevelopment project, namely: the late Seiroku Kajiyama (former chief cabinet secretary), Yukio Okamoto (former prime minister's adviser), and Haruo Shimada (president of Chiba University of Commerce).

The trio are regarded as "benefactors" who contributed to the town's development through the special projects for the economic

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revitalization of municipalities hosting U.S. military bases in Okinawa (commonly referred to as the Shimada Commission projects), and the statues were donated by the construction companies in Kadena.

Negotiating card necessary

The government spent 83.6 billion yen for the Shimada Commission projects from FY97-99, and Kadena received over 20 billion yen. Mayor Tokujitsu Miyagi, 73, claims, "While other municipalities were stunned by the sudden availability of subsidies, we made calculated moves to obtain the budget." He further invited the Okinawa Defense Bureau in Naha (with a staff of approximately 440) to a building in the town's redevelopment project, thereby earning income from its rent and expanding consumption in the town.

However, even Kadena, which has handled its dealings with Tokyo shrewdly, has become increasingly dependent on the bases, with its base-related income surpassing tax revenues. Yet, there is no guarantee that this arrangement will continue forever.

The special measures law for Okinawa's development and the Okinawa economic development program are due to expire in FY2011. While a total of some 9 trillion yen has been spent on Okinawa's development since its reversion to Japanese administration in 1972, such

spending has been declining due to the government's fiscal difficulties. Okinawa still has the worst unemployment rate in the whole country. Therefore, there is a persistent opinion among Okinawans that "the bases are necessary as a negotiating card to obtain assistance from the government."

Okinawa has been at the mercy of base-related money for 13 years. Will the same turmoil be repeated at the new relocation site to be selected by the government in May, at the earliest?

No feasible relocation site; growing local demand for relocation out of Okinawa

The Futenma base sits in the center of Ginowan carved out of the city like the hole in a doughnut. After the election of an opponent to Futenma relocation won the Nago mayoral election, Mayor Yoichi Iha, 58, argued, "Relocation within Okinawa or the construction of a new military base is no longer possible. It is fully possible to relocate (the Futenma base) to Guam."

There had also been no progress at all in the relocation process when a U.S. military helicopter crashed into the Okinawa International University in 2004. There is now hope that "the Hatoyama administration will not negotiate with the U.S. on the assumption that a replacement facility will be built."

The three ruling parties inspected Camp Fuji (in Shizuoka Prefecture), the Iwakuni base (in Yamaguchi Prefecture), the Maritime Self-Defense Force's Omura base, and other locations since late 2009, but the local leaders all refused to accept Futenma's relocation. Proposals to integrate Futenma with KAB or to relocate to the islands of Shimojishima or Iejima have reemerged in Okinawa. Kadena Mayor Miyagi told an executive meeting of the national association of municipalities on Jan. 28 that, "Okinawa cannot accept any more bases. The whole country should be ready to share the burden imposed by the bases."

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Will the Futenma base remain where it is because a new relocation site cannot be found? Repair work on the runway in Futenma began in January in anticipation of the continued use of this base. A man living just outside the base fence, 75, laments, "I have been looking forward to the return of the base for 13 years, but it probably won't happen during my lifetime."

Former Governor Keiichi Inamine, 76, who accepted Futenma relocation in 1999, says: "The Hatoyama administration has opened Pandora's Box. The magma of the Okinawan people's discontent will never stop flowing now."

(9) Editorial: Japan as a sovereign nation must revise SOFA

RYUKYU SHIMPO (Page 2) (Full)
January 29, 2010.

If a country under the rule of law were to allow criminals to escape, it would collapse from the ground up. The barrier of the Japan-U.S. Status of Forces Agreement, or SOFA for short, threatens the daily lives of people in Okinawa Prefecture to the extent that judicial authorities have expressed a sense of crisis.

On Jan. 27, the Naha District Public Prosecutors Office indicted a staff sergeant attached to the U.S. Army's Special Forces in Okinawa on the additional charge of involvement in a fatal hit-and-run incident in the village of Yomitan.

The prosecutors took a long time, about three months after the incident occurred, to indict the U.S. serviceman on hit-and-run charges. This is ascribable to SOFA provisions that block the pre-indictment turnover of suspects.

The victim was killed, and there were no eyewitnesses. The U.S. serviceman suspect, the key to grasping the circumstances surrounding the incident, has denied the allegations and refused to comply with the local police's request for voluntary questioning.

The United States, hiding behind the SOFA, remained negative about handing over the suspect to local investigative authorities, only to protract local police investigations.

Following the rape of a schoolgirl in 1995, the Japanese and U.S. governments announced "improvements in SOFA implementation." The U.S. government promised "sympathetic consideration" for Japanese police requests for the pre-indictment handover of criminal suspects in the case of serious crimes.

In the case of this hit-and-run incident, however, there was no sympathetic consideration from the United States.

In spite of the SOFA-erected barriers to the investigation, the local prosecutors could go ahead with indictment. This is because there was physical evidence, such as the vehicle involved in the incident and the victim's body, and there was objective evidence for determining the vehicle's speed and the circumstances of the collision.

In the case of heinous crimes such as murder and rape with little physical evidence, police would certainly face hurdles to investigation. Investigators could end up in a blind alley, with the

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investigations protracted and evidence destroyed. Judicial authorities have also expressed a sense of crisis.

The incident occurred in Japan. Even though the suspect is a U.S. serviceman, his crime was committed in Japan, so Japanese law was applicable, and the suspect should be tried in Japan and punished. This is clearly stipulated in SOFA Article 17. This stipulation, however, has, in fact, become a dead letter.

A sovereign nation is synonymous with an independent nation that can completely exercise its sovereignty. Dictionaries define a sovereign nation as a nation that can exercise its sovereignty and judiciary power in cases in which foreign nationals committed crimes within its borders.

Even though Japanese nationals fall victim to crimes committed by foreign nationals, Japan depends on a foreign nation's sympathetic consideration to conduct investigations and arrest criminals. Such a country can't be called a sovereign country or an independent country.

In the first place, U.S. troops are stationed here for the security of the Far East and the defense of Japan. They are not stationed here to take the lives of Japanese people.

U.S. soldiers threaten the Japanese people they should protect. The Japanese government signed, without revising, the SOFA, under which vicious U.S. servicemen can't be tried, endangering the lives of the Japanese people. The Japanese public should not forgive such a government and its bureaucracy.

(10) Editorial: Obama's State of the Union address -- Credibility of statements to be tested

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 5) (Full)
January 29, 2010

U.S. President Barack Obama delivered a State of the Union address for the first time since assuming office. Amid declining public support ratings, Obama said, "I will forge ahead even with unpopular policies," expressing his sense of historical mission. In his second year in office, the credibility of his words will be tested.

Obama delivered his first State of the Union address while facing a headwind.

The timing of Obama's State of the Union address was ironic because he delivered the speech immediately after the Democratic candidate had been defeated in the election to fill the Massachusetts Senate seat and because his expectations for boosting his administration's

popularity through the expected passage of the health care reform bill, which is the most pressing domestic issue, have come up short.

It is reasonable for Obama to spend time on internal affairs, in particular on employment policy. "One year ago, I took office amid two wars, an economy rocked by a severe recession, a financial system on the verge of collapse, and a government deeply in debt," said Obama.

It is normal for a new government that has carried out a change of administration to underscore the negative legacy it has inherited

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from the previous government and stress its burgeoning accomplishments. Obama sought understanding for his administration's achievements in overcoming a financial crisis comparable to the Great Depression with aggressive fiscal spending, as well as for public assistance for major financial institutions, which is an unpopular policy. He said, "Our policy prevented 2 million people from losing their jobs. We diverted 30 billion dollars from Wall Street to small and medium-sized companies."

Citing data on employment achieved in such industries as construction and energy services by economic stimulus measures, Obama explained his medium and long-term plans to expand job opportunities. Amid a jobless rate of over 10 percent, it will probably be a race against time for the economic measures to produce positive results for the public, which has grown increasingly angry and anxious.

The campaign for the fall mid-term congressional elections has already begun. The Republican Party, too, is desperate to draw on its victory i.

Q[L[Qzzation of nuclear weapons, has been set for April. The Obama government will withdraw its troops from Iraq in August. If Islamic extremists sense a lack of the unity in the international community, they will attack immediately. Whether the nuclear security summit can produce specific results remains unclear.

During his speech that lasted more than one hour, a tense silence prevailed in the chamber every now and then. Recalling the hardships of history of the foundation of America, the people listened intently and respectfully to his words of inspiration. The people are desperately hoping for the President to exercise his ability to implement them in his second year in office.

(11) DPJ Secretary General Ozawa questioned again by prosecutors on land deal on January 31

MAINICHI (Page 1) (Abridged)
Evening, February 1, 2010

It appears that the Special Investigation Division of the Tokyo District Prosecutors Office has questioned Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) Secretary General Ichiro Ozawa again on the land deal involving his fund management organization, the Rikuzan-kai, in Tokyo on Jan. 31. Ozawa's statements at his regular secretary general's news conference on the afternoon of Feb. 1 will be the focus of keen interest.

Although the Special Investigation Division questioned Ozawa once on Jan. 23 on the facts relating to the land deal, it is believed that the prosecutors sought further explanation from Ozawa at a hotel in Tokyo on the afternoon of Jan. 31 on the questionable points from the first session. The second session was apparently an extension of the first one. It appears that Ozawa's testimony was recorded in a formal statement.

(12) First Ainu policy meeting held on Jan. 29

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MAINICHI (Page 5) (Full)
January 30, 2010

The government Ainu policy promotion panel, headed by Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirofumi Hirano, held its first meeting on Jan. 29 at the Prime Minister's Official Residence. On the basis of a report compiled by an expert panel set up in the previous coalition government of the Liberal Democratic Party and New Komeito, the government Ainu policy promotion panel will look into conducting a fact-finding survey of the actual conditions of the lives of Ainu people living in Hokkaido. (The Ainu are an indigenous ethnic group of Japan.)

(13) Parents and children after divorce; (Part 2): Husband took son away to his home country

YOMIURI (Page 17) (Full)
January 27, 2010

Kayoko Yamada, 41, a nurse from Yamagata City, Gifu Prefecture, stood last December on a street in Tokyo's Shinjuku district passing out flyers reading "My son was suddenly taken away from Japan in August 2009" seeking cooperation in her effort to get her son back.

Her Czech husband, who she had been living with in Gifu, has not returned to Japan after leaving the country with their son, 5. Her husband got into the car with their son on the morning of Aug. 23 to "put gasoline in the car." "See you Mom. Dad is going to buy me a toy," were the last words her son said to her.

Evening came, but they did not return. Late that night, Yamada received an e-mail saying, "We're going on a trip." She hurriedly notified the police of the situation late that night and rushed to the airport first thing in the morning. She could not find her husband and her son there. After returning to the police station to file a search request, she received a telephone call from her husband. "We are in Frankfurt (in Germany)," her husband said and he hung up." Yamada cried out at the police station.

After being told by the police that they were unable to handle marriage problems, she sought the cooperation of the Foreign Ministry, the Czech embassy in Japan, and the Japanese embassy in Prague. But there has been no progress on the matter.

There is a strong possibility that her son is in Prague where her husband's parents' home is located, according to Yamada. "I want to travel to the Czech Republic right away to take my child back," Yamada said. "But I might end up facing charges of abduction as a result of trying to bring him back to Japan. If I'm caught, will the Japanese government help me?"

The Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction exists to deal with cross-border child abduction. Japan is not a signatory to the convention. "The Czech Republic is a signatory to the convention, so if Japan was a signatory, Japan might have been able to find some clues to resolving Ms. Yamada's case," said a lawyer well-versed in international marriage.

The United States and many European countries are signatories to the Hague Convention. If the parent from whom the child was taken files a complaint with his or her home government, the government of another parent is required under the convention to extend

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cooperation, such as searching for the whereabouts of the child, to return the child to his or her habitual country or residence.

There are also cases in which parents living outside Japan cannot see their children after they are taken to Japan from the United States and other Hague Convention signatory countries in Europe.

Robert Smith, 40, an American company employee, is having a hard time finding a way to reclaim his child. His former Japanese wife took his son, an elementary school student, to Japan two years ago, and they have not come back to the United States since. He received e-mails via his ex-wife's lawyer saying, "You cannot see my son,"

and "As the mother of the child, I deserve the custody of our son."

Their divorce was granted in the United States. They reached an agreement in which out of two weeks, the son would spend six days with his father and eight days with his mother. The son was dividing his time between his parents who were living in the same state. "My ex-wife said that she was just taking our son to Japan to visit her hometown, so I never imagined that they wouldn't come back," Smith said, slumping down in disappointment.

The Foreign Ministry has received 177 cases from the United States, Canada, UK, and France in which one parent had taken a child to Japan without the consent of the other parent. Last fall, an American was arrested on suspicion of abducting a minor as he tried to reclaim his son from his former Japanese wife in Japan in an effort to take him back to the United States. With the aim of avoiding such a situation, signatories to the Hague Convention are calling for Japan to accede to the convention.

(14) Parents and children after divorce, (Part 3): Rumors widespread in U.S. and European countries that Japan is a country that does not allow the parent living apart from the child to see the child after divorce

YOMIURI (Page 17) (Full)
January 28, 2010

Rumors are widespread in the United States and European countries that Japan is a country that does not allow the parent who lives apart from the child to see the child after divorce. Those rumors have given rise to new conflicts regarding parents and children.

The grade-school son of a woman we will call "Ms. U," 46, a company employee in the Tokai region, went to see his father in the United States a year and a half ago, and he has not returned to Japan since. The couple decided to live separately five years ago. They jointly raised their son, making him divide his time between Japan and the United States in accordance with the letters of consent they exchanged. But in the summer of 2008, her son did not come back to Japan on the scheduled day, and Ms. U was not able to contact him.

Ms. U then hired a lawyer in the United States and had her lawyer press her husband to return her son to Japan. It took a year and a half for her husband to accept her request for talks. But in talks, her husband fiercely refused to let his son travel to Japan, saying, "If I let him go to Japan, which is not a signatory to the Hague Convention, he might not come back to the United States."

The Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction is designed to insure the prompt return of a child who has

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been abducted by one parent without the consent of another parent to the child's country of habitual residence.

"I have strictly abided by the visitation agreement, so why has he abruptly decided to keep my son from me?" Ms. U said, biting her lip. A while later she received from her husband some photographs of her son, now grown big. "Is this really my son?" she was surprised. "I could really feel that I had not been able to see my son for a year and a half."

"The United States and other Hague Convention member countries in Europe take a stern view of Japan, which has not joined the convention," said Mikiko Otani, a lawyer well-versed in international marriage. There are many cases in which the father and mother live in different countries, like Ms. U, and one parent living outside Japan does not allow the child to travel to the other parent's country.

It is also said that there are cases in which a Japanese parent is not allowed to sit at the negotiating table with the concerned party from a Hague Convention member country. "The reason is that Japan is regarded as a country that does not allow the parent living separately to see the child and it is as though that there is no room for talks," Otani explained. "If this situation persists,

Japanese spouses might be placed in an extremely disadvantageous position."

In fact, a Japanese woman during a divorce trial asked her husband to let her and her daughter return to Japan because her father was sick. But her husband turned down her request. The trial dragged on, and the woman eventually returned to Japan with her daughter without obtaining the consent of her husband. "If Japan were a signatory to the Hague Convention, my request would have been accepted, and there was no need to return to Japan without the consent of my husband," the woman said looking back on those days.

Questions have been raised about Japan's non-Hague Convention status chiefly by foreign spouses from whom children were taken, saying they cannot take their children back to their countries. The United States and European countries are urging the Japanese government to accede to the convention. It has now become a diplomatic issue.

Japanese spouses are often put at a disadvantage, and there is an active movement in Japan calling for Tokyo to sign the convention.

Given the situation, the Foreign Ministry set up late last year an office to handle international child custody issues. At the same time, a cautious stance still prevails in the government because of cases in which Japanese spouses have to bring their children back to Japan from abroad due to such circumstances as child abuse.

In 2008, there were about 37,000 international marriages, and some 19,000 international marriages ended in divorce, almost twice the number marked ten years earlier. Caught in different systems and values, the parties concerned are continuing exploring ways to build family relationships after divorce in an age of internationalization.

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